

The Interlocutor

At eight in the morning I put on my dark suit and sit in the front room right next to the low, screened window. It is not that I am old and bored and have nothing else to do, on the contrary, I have a great deal of responsibility.

At half-past the mailman stops by and tells me again how much he wants to be a writer. He imagined that by carrying loads of prose he would more or less absorb a feeling for style, but it doesn't seem to be working.

I suggest to him that Freddy Zip Code is his muse and a novel composed entirely of numbers might be just what the world is looking for.

From next door comes the wife of a men's-room-attendant-and-philosopher. She confesses that she longs for Tony Curtis, that she has a life-size picture of him that she sleeps with but lately she has started to feel cold and distant toward it. What should she do?

I advise her to purchase a life-size photo of Steve McQueen. Tony Curtis, as everyone knows, is a flit.

They come and go all afternoon, and by evening the street is full of them: the M.D. who believes in chiropractors, the shy gardener who cannot call a spade a spade, the butcher who beats his meat. They wait patiently in the glow of the street lights, enjoying

the smell of begonias in the cool night air
and eventually I hear them all.

Then I stand and sigh,
pull the shade
retire to my bedroom.

As I take off my goofy vestments, the real or imaginary problems I have
solved or complicated
sadden me for a moment, but no longer than that.
In fact, the entire period of grief consists of just the time it takes
to lay my head on the pillow and whisper
Boo Hoo.

Then I grin, turn out the light
and go to sleep.

Pour Vous, Agnes

You have stopped at the Smile Shop on your way
Home, and now your purchase hangs precariously
In front of your teeth.

You are secure because you know I cannot leave
The house. You think I tinker away my time
On nonsense.

That is all you know. Right now in the basement
There is the slightest glow and the tiniest hum
From a machine of my own invention.

The gears and pulleys from my first wife's heart,
The screws that were loose for so long, the levers
And chains of my misfortunes: they are all
Cunningly assembled into a device which will,
I feel certain, take your breath away.